

Next year, the United States will make the transition to the next generation of television. For years and years, television stations have broadcast using something called an analog signal. It is old, it is outdated, and it will soon be phased out.

By law beginning on February 17, 2009, television stations will start broadcasting using only a next generation digital signal. The transition will free up scarce broadcasting spectrum for emergency first responders as well as the development of advanced services like wireless broadband Internet.

The upcoming transition has understandably raised some questions. The most common ones I hear are “Why is this being done in the first place?” and “Does this mean my TV is going to stop working?” In a nutshell, here is how the transition will work.

First and foremost, most consumers will notice little difference from one day to the next. Digital television, with its improved sound and picture quality, has been around for more than a decade. Many TVs are already equipped to receive a digital signal. As a result, many consumers will not need to purchase any new equipment or make any other changes before the transition takes place next February.

For individuals that own an older TV which relies on “rabbit ears” or an outdoor antenna to receive a signal, there will be some change involved. In order to continue receiving a free over-the-air television signal after February 17, 2009, it will be necessary to buy a converter box. These units are available at most electronics stores and cost approximately \$40 to \$70 each.

To help defray the cost, every American household is eligible to apply for up to two coupons which will reduce the cost of purchasing a converter box by \$40. More information about how to apply for a coupon is available online at: [www.dtv2009.gov](http://www.dtv2009.gov).

Regardless of when your TV was made, it will continue working with cable, satellite, VCRs, DVD players, camcorders, video game consoles, and other devices next February and throughout the foreseeable future. It is only the ability to receive a signal over-the-air that will change.

As the transition draws closer, more questions are likely to arise. For answers and clarifications, please do not hesitate to call your congressman. Answers to frequently asked questions are also available online at the official website for the digital transition: [www.dtv.gov](http://www.dtv.gov).

At the end of this process, Americans will soon enjoy improved sound and picture quality on their TVs while paving the way for improved communication between our emergency first responders. The transition may be a bit complicated, but in the end it will also be well worth it.

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